

## 43rd ASSEMBLY DISTRICT • ASSEMBLY DEMOCRATIC CAUCUS CHAIR

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## Jorgensen: Half-Baked Public Benefit Bills Miss the Mark on Fraud Reduction, Stand to Harm Those in Need

MADISON – State Representative Andy Jorgensen (D-Milton) decried Assembly Bill 212 and Assembly Bill 222, heard today in the Public Benefit Reform Committee, on which he serves as ranking Democrat. AB 212 stands to bar people from the state unemployment program for seven years, if they make simple mistakes filing a claim, while AB 222 would require a photograph of a FoodShare recipient on their Quest card to use the benefit.

"Republicans and Democrats agree on this point: fraud should be stamped out of our state welfare programs," said Jorgensen. "The problem is, these bills don't stamp out fraud. They just kick folks who are already down and out."

During discussions on AB 212, Jorgensen pointed out that a recent report from the Legislative Audit Bureau showed a whopping 85% of unemployment overpayments are a direct result of unintentional reporting errors. That's little wonder, given that the Department of Workforce Development's mandatory filing survey includes complex questions and unfamiliar terminology, which the federal government has determined to be problematic.

"If we don't fix the questions and this bill becomes law, hundreds – and maybe thousands – of people will lose the support they've earned and truly need as they search for work. These folks aren't fraudsters, they're just human beings who made simple mistakes," said Jorgensen. "If we slow down and address the real issue – the confusing filing process – we could do so much more good."

Debate over AB 222 revealed more questions than answers. Democrats asked how FoodShare participants would get to an income benefit office to get a picture taken, if they don't have transportation, are homebound, or have challenging work schedules; the author, Rep. Jesse Kremer (R- Kewaskum), wasn't sure and suggested they might "go to Walmart or Walgreens" to be photographed. Democrats asked what would happen if an ailing FoodShare participant needed to have a family member or friend pick up their groceries; Rep. Kremer suggested they might be exempted but couldn't give assurances that they would be. Democrats asked what would happen if someone was caught wrongfully using another individual's Quest card, and were puzzled to learn that the bill offered no mandate to report such fraud.

"The 'hearing' on AB 222 was more like a brainstorming session," said Jorgensen. "Clearly, it's a half-baked idea intended to grab a quick headline. But, Republicans ought to stop playing politics with programs that offer lifeline benefits to those in need. It's just plain wrong."